

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 SAM-01 DHA-02 IO-13 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /079 W

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R 241358Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9252

INFO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY MEXICO

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 5619

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SHUM, SY

SUBJECT: NO BASIS FOR RABBI HERSHBERG'S CLAIM THAT SYRIA
READY PERMIT REUNIFICATION SYRIAN JEWS WITH RELATIVES
ABROAD

1. ACCORDING OUR MONITORING OF RADIO ISRAEL MORNING
AUGUST 23, RABBI ABRAHAM HERSHBERG STATED ON HIS ARRIVAL IN
ISRAEL THAT PRESIDENT ASAD HAD AGREED TO REUNIFICATION
BETWEEN SYRIAN JEWISH FAMILIES AND THEIR RELATIVES IN
ISRAEL.

2. IN MEETING WITH PRESIDENT'S POLITICAL ADVISOR ADIB
DAOUDI AUGUST 23, I INQUIRED ABOUT THIS NEWS REPORT.
DAOUDI IMMEDIATELY CHECKED WITH PRESIDENT'S PRESS SECRETARY/
INTERPRETER WHO ADVISED THAT DESPITE HIS ANNOUNCED IN-
TENTION OF VISITING SYRIA, RABBI HERSHBERG HAD
NEVER COME HERE AND THERE HAD BEEN NO WRITTEN COMMUNICA-
TION BETWEEN HIM AND PRESIDENT ASAD. (COMMENT: EMBASSY
TEHRAN HAD ADVISED US AUGUST 11 THAT RABBI HERSHBERG
WOULD ARRIVE IN DAMASCUS THE FOLLOWING DAY. IF HE IN FACT
VISIT DAMASCUS, HERSHBERG DID NOT CONTACT THIS EMBASSY.)

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3. DAOUDI NOTED THAT SYRIA'S UN MISSION HAD BEEN CONTACTED BY AN EMISSARY FROM HERSHBERG SOME WEEKS AGO STATING THAT RABBI WOULD BE CARRYING A PERSONAL MESSAGE TO ASAD FROM MEXICAN PRESIDENT ECHEVERRIA. SYRIAN MISSION CHECKED WITH MEXICAN MISSION WHICH ADVISED SYRIANS THAT THIS WAS FALSE AND THAT GERSHBERG WAS CARRYING NO PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE AND WOULD BE TRAVELING AS PRIVATE MEXICAN CITIZEN.

4. AS FAR AS ISRAELI NEWS REPORT WAS CONCERNED, DAOUDI NOTED THAT HERSHBERG MAY HAVE BASED HIS STATEMENT ABOUT ASAD'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS FAMILY REUNIFICATION ON REPORTS OF MEETING IN EARLY 1975 BETWEEN PRESIDENT AND CONGRESSMAN STEPHEN SOLARZ. ASAD'S POSITION REMAINED AS SET FORTH THEN TO SOLARZ. PRESIDENT RECOGNIZED THERE WAS A GENUINE HUMANITARIAN PROBLEM OF DIVIDED FAMILIES BUT HE WOULD NOT AUTHORIZE DEPARTURE OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF THE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY UNLESS FIRM GUARANTEES COULD BE FURNISHED THAT THOSE LEAVING FOR COUNTRIES OTHER THAN ISRAEL WOULD NOT AT SOME POINT END UP IN ISRAEL ITSELF. PRESIDENT HAD STRESSED TO SOLARZ THAT SYRIAN JEWS WITH AMERICAN PASSPORTS COULD RETURN FREELY AND IN SAFETY TO VISIT THEIR RELATIVES IN SYRIA.

5. AMBASSADOR THANKED DAOUDI FOR BACKGROUND ON HERSHBERG STORY. HE EXPRESSED HOPE THAT TIME WOULD SOON COME WHEN AT LEAST THE ELDERLY SYRIAN JEWISH RELATIVES OF AMERICAN CITIZENS WOULD BE PERMITTED TO JOIN THEIR FAMILIES IN THE U.S. THIS WOULD BE NOT ONLY A SIGNIFICANT HUMANITARIAN GESTURE BUT WOULD SUBSTANTIALLY ENHANCE SYRIA'S PUBLIC IMAGE.
MURPHY

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